

2013 ADDRESS BY SPEAKER TIMOTHY W. JONES

Friends and colleagues:

Let me first say thank you for the immense honor you have given me to serve as your Speaker. I am truly blessed to be able to lead such a remarkable group of public servants and I am excited to work with each and every one of you in the coming months to advance the policy items that mean the most to you and to all the people of your districts.

Let me also thank the members, past and present, who so graciously escorted me to the dais to receive this honor. Thank you for your support and friendship.

Let me give extra special thanks to my good friend Danie Moore, the former Lady from Callaway, who made the trip to Jefferson City today to serve on the escort committee. Danie was a mentor and a friend during my first years here in the House. She was an immense help to me as I learned my way in this legislative body. I know there are many of you who can say the same. Thank you, Lady from Callaway, for being such a conscientious public servant and such a giving and caring soul.

And thank you to another of my mentors...someone who has given me sage advice throughout my entire life...who has helped make me the man and the legislator I am today...someone who happens to be my uncle...and the father of our colleague, the Gentleman from Moniteau. Please join me in welcoming the former Gentleman from Moniteau...our friend and fellow public servant...my uncle, Kenny Jones. Thank you for being a guiding force in my life and for teaching me what it means to serve with honesty and integrity.

Thanks as well to the Chief Justice of the Missouri Supreme Court, Richard Teitelman, for swearing us in as members of the House, to Judge Dan Pelikan for administering the oath of office I have taken as your Speaker, and to our House Chaplains, Monsignor Kurwicki and Father Spezia, for providing us with their spiritual guidance as we embark on this important legislative session.

Let me also take a few moments to thank my family for the support they have given me as I have pursued this dream of public service. A heartfelt thank you to my parents who are with us today and to all of my family and friends, many of whom have driven great distances to share in this moment with me. Your love and support have enabled and empowered me to make this incredible journey. It's a journey that has meant long hours here in the Capitol, travel to all four corners of our great state, long hours and days away from home, and apart from my loving wife, Suzanne, and our beautiful daughters, Katherine and Abigail. Even as my duties here have kept me away from the people I love the most, they have never wavered in their commitment to support me, to ground me, and to remind me what truly matters most in my life. Without the encouragement and the love they have given me over the years, I would not be here today. Suzanne, Katie, Abby – thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this dream a reality. I could not have done it without you.

The truth is, when you make sacrifices such as these – and we all make them when we choose to serve – you do so with the hope that the precious moments you miss in your personal life are outweighed by the opportunity you gain in your public life to do something truly remarkable, not just for the ones you love – but for every man, woman and child who calls our great state of Missouri home.

As I've traveled around the state over the course of the last few months and during the last six years as I have served as a state representative, I've had the opportunity to meet with and learn the stories of so many outstanding Missourians. From single parents who have overcome adversity to provide a brighter future for their children, to business owners who have found a way to not only survive but thrive in the face of challenging economic times, to farm families who have endured and overcome some of the toughest years in memory. All have markedly different backgrounds and experiences, but all share the common traits of diligence and determination that have allowed them to succeed in the face of adversity. All have an unrelenting desire to see Missouri become a state where our opportunities outnumber our obstacles—where government can maintain a level playing field that gives all Missourians the chance to make their dreams a reality.

In all that we do, the people expect us to abide by a simple rule – that government shall serve not as the ruler of the people, but that the will of the people shall rule their government. As our state motto forever reminds us, the welfare of the people shall be the supreme law of the land. It is a motto that should be in our hearts and our minds with every action we take as public servants.

As we embark on the 2013 legislative session, we have within our grasp the ability to make our state stronger and more prosperous than it has ever been.

The people of this state sent the largest Republican caucus in the history of the Missouri House to Jefferson City to advance a bold and ambitious policy agenda – one that will mean more and better jobs for those in need of work, innovative solutions to our current and future energy needs, and outside-the-box thinking when it comes to reforming a system of education that has far too often failed to meet the needs of our young people.

Over the last few months I have met with many of you across the state to discuss the agenda items we want to address during this session. From our discussions and our conversations – from the input I have received from the people we are elected to serve – we have developed what I refer to as the “Triple E Agenda.” It’s an agenda I believe that can make Missouri the strongest state in the nation in the areas of Economic Development, Energy Policy, and Education.

Economic Development and Job Creation

Regardless of our party affiliations – or the area of the state from which we hail – we all can agree that effective economic development and job creation policies are essential to ensure a bright future for Missouri.

While our economy has begun to show signs of life and the unemployment rate continues to be significantly below the national average, it is clear we must do more to make Missouri’s business climate one that is friendly to existing and potential employers, and that encourages the creation of good-paying jobs that will allow Missouri families to prosper.

One of my top priorities for this legislative session is to reform our medical malpractice system–so we can protect Missouri businesses and our entire system of health care from frivolous lawsuits and encourage new job creation. When the Supreme Court struck down the caps last year, it opened a floodgate of lawsuits that threaten to drive the cost of medical malpractice insurance through the roof, which will increase the cost of care and will encourage the use of socalled “defensive medicine.” The truth is, unless we take action to fix this problem, we will see millions of dollars in the health care industry diverted away from care from health care investment – from health care education – from creating health care jobs—and instead those precious dollars will be needed for legal defense costs.

These are facts that cannot be denied.

Unless we act, health care costs will increase and health care quality will decline as many of our best doctors will inevitably flee the state. That is why we will work this session to stave off this looming threat by reinstating a reasonable cap – by making reforms that will ensure health care providers are not in danger of being targeted by harmful, needless litigation. We must also work to improve our business climate by making Missouri’s employment law standards comparable to national standards. Court decisions have pushed employment laws above and beyond what is required by federal law – something that has negatively impacted our ability to attract new employers to our state and maintain the ones that are already doing business here. It’s time to give Missouri employers the kind of certainty in the legal system that will allow them to focus on growing their businesses and creating jobs rather than worrying about unnecessary lawsuits.

Another element to improving our business climate and encouraging economic development will be to improve our workers’ compensation system. We must make sure that both workers’ compensation and the Second Injury Fund remain solvent to ensure employers are protected from the costs of workplace accidents. If the insolvent Second Injury Fund cannot be salvaged without unfairly penalizing job creators with excessive taxation – we must follow the lead of many other states and begin the task of winding down this fund which has been mismanaged for decades.

One of the most critical components of the economic development portion of our Triple E Agenda is focused on maintaining and creating incentive tools that work.

This session I want to see this legislative body make a commitment to “Cut, Cap and Create.”

Missouri has a significant number of tax credit programs – 61 in all – and it is no secret not all of these programs are accomplishing a useful goal. It will be a House priority to make changes this session that encourage oversight over these programs – eliminate the credits that do not work – cap programs at a reasonable level to provide budget certainty, create new programs that are fiscally responsible, have significant taxpayer protections and that are immediately fiscally positive.

Our benevolent tax credits must be part of this discussion as well. These credits have been instrumental in helping so many worthwhile causes, from pregnancy resource centers to food pantries. This year we must work to reinstate the credits that have helped our charitable organizations to do so much for so many.

We also must give careful consideration to ways we can supplement our economic development efforts by improving our state's infrastructure. We must work to make sure our roads and bridges – our essential transportation routes – are maintained, are repaired, and are rebuilt and that our essential state services – and the college campuses where young minds are prepared for the future – have the resources and facilities they need to succeed. This means giving serious consideration to a bonding proposal that could generate billions of dollars for these crucial projects. It will help us meet the demands we face today as well as those our state will face in the future.

Energy Policy

The second component of the Triple E I will ask this body to focus their efforts on this year deals with our state's energy future. We must work to ensure Missouri embraces responsible energy policies that will encourage affordable energy prices and technological development. We must continue to explore and pursue opportunities with the Department of Energy to develop the small modular reactor industry here in our state.

We must ensure Missouri becomes part of this incredibly exciting industry of the future. We must also work to ensure our regulatory framework does not impede Missourians from using existing energy sources or pursuing new developments using our God-given natural resources like coal and natural gas. Only by using an "all of the above" energy framework can we hope to achieve energy independence.

In all that we do, we must adhere to the free-market principles that have made this country great. The free market should dictate and drive our energy independent future – not government subsidies which engage in artificial market controls and support crony capitalism. Exciting new energy endeavors are part and parcel of this equation, but we must also embrace the abundance of natural resources laid out before us.

Education Reform

The final E in the House agenda is education funding and reform. Although we may at times differ in our opinions of how to reach our goals, we can all agree that a strong, effective education system – as guaranteed by our state constitution – is the key to ensuring prosperity for future generations of Missourians.

One of the top concerns we must address this session is protecting education funding from continued encroachment by the Governor's welfare expansion funding demands. It is irresponsible to place the immediate benefits of entitlement funding ahead of education. The students of today will become the job creators and business and community leaders of tomorrow.

Our children deserve access to the highest quality education available, but our schools will not be able to provide this level of education if their funding is consistently slashed to the bone to fund an ever-increasing, bloated entitlement system that is full of waste, fraud and abuse.

We must also work to improve and reform our education system in general. Our two largest school districts are failing. We must provide these districts and every other district in our state the tools to ensure that effective teaching, not bureaucracy, is the number one priority.

A key component of accomplishing this goal is to ensure schools are able to evaluate teacher performance. Hold poor teachers accountable for their actions while rewarding the overwhelming majority of good and excellent teachers. Our antiquated, overly bureaucratic education system is the antithesis of innovation and excellence. Teachers should be rewarded for their performance and encouraged to boldly engage in the technological innovations that will create the highly skilled workforce of tomorrow that we so desperately need.

We must enhance local control of the education system. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to education. We should recognize that local districts and parents need to have more influence over their curriculum and policies. Innovative policies exercised at the local level could provide a road map for success to schools across our state.

Finally, we must work to ensure that parents are provided the opportunity to be involved in their children's education. Education cannot just begin and end at the schoolhouse door. It must continue at home, and parents should take an active role in ensuring their children are learning what they need to succeed. This can be accomplished by providing parents more power to intervene in failing school districts and force the necessary changes to ensure access to an effective education.

I hope you will follow with me this session as we place these three components at the forefront of our discussions. While I think these issues are the key to building a better Missouri, there are many other policy issues that will reach this floor, in this Chamber, for discussion in the months to come.

Whether it's creating a fiscally responsible spending plan that makes the best possible use of your taxpayer dollars...

...protecting the rights of millions of hardworking men and women who are employed in Missouri

...defending the time-honored traditions of farming, hunting and fishing that have made this state the great place it is today

...ensuring that all life is held sacred and our children are able to grow into healthy, productive adults

...or standing in defense of the rights and freedoms that our founding fathers handed down to us more than 200 years ago...

we will have important decisions to make that extend beyond these policy goals we have outlined with my Triple E Agenda.

With every decision we make, I hope we can keep in mind all of the Missourians out there who are counting on us to make the right decisions to put the policies in place that will pave the way for prosperity.

They have sent our caucus here in record numbers – a veto-proof super majority – because we have proven to be effective leaders in our communities and because they now expect us to lead the way on issues that matter to Missouri's families and businesses in all parts of our great state.

The citizens who entrusted us with this duty want nothing more than a government that removes the barriers to success rather than creates them...

...that keeps the playing field level rather than tipped in favor of one group or another

...that focuses its attention on the needs of all the people rather than the political schemes of a powerful few.

I have asked some of these remarkable people to join us here today as special guests.

Outstanding Missourians like Rhonda Broussard, who founded the St. Louis Language Immersion School.

I am thrilled to have Rhonda with us today as one of our special guests. I ask all of you to join me in recognizing her for the groundbreaking work she has done to provide a world-class education to hundreds of Missouri children.

The more than 500 young people her school educates come from all walks of life and 44 different zip codes. And while they have different backgrounds, they share in the immense opportunity to receive an education that will give them fluency in a foreign language, a mastery of the English language, and an undeniable educational advantage that will open the doors of opportunity for them both now and in the future.

With her hard work and determination and the incredible vision she has shared with the young people of the City of St. Louis Rhonda Broussard has shown us what our system of education can look like when we embrace innovation and support creative solutions. Her work has made, and will continue to make, a profound positive impact in the lives of hundreds, and soon-to-be thousands, of young people.

Rhonda, for your hard work, your dedication and your desire to make a difference the members of the Missouri House say thank you, and we pledge to continue to support policies that will allow dreams like yours to become reality.

We're blessed to have Rhonda with us today. We're equally blessed to have another outstanding Missourian in the Chamber with us from Northeast Missouri. Please join me in welcoming Cindy O'Laughlin.

Cindy and her husband Russell are the proud owners of a small, family-run business that is such a key component in our state's economic success. First begun by Russell's father, O'Laughlin, Incorporated has been in operation for six decades and has expanded from a small dump truck operation to a flourishing, multifaceted business that provides a variety of services to individuals and larger corporations throughout the state providing jobs for nearly 50 employees in three different small Missouri communities.

O'Laughlin Inc., like thousands of small businesses across Missouri and across our nation, is a vital part of the rural communities in which it operates. Not only do Cindy and Russell provide good-paying jobs with benefits to dozens of industrious Missourians, they donate their time, effort and, yes, their money, to make their communities stronger and more vibrant.

When we talk here in this chamber about the policies we support and how they impact business owners, we are talking about exceptional Missourians like Cindy and Russell O'Laughlin. The decisions we make here help create a business environment that allows businesses like hers to succeed through good, old-fashioned hard work and determination and her success, and the success of so many other small businesses, is what drives our economic engine

and allows our state to move in a more positive and prosperous direction.

Cindy, we thank you for all that you and your family have done to create such a successful Missouri business that supports Missouri communities and provides jobs to hard-working Missourians. As a legislature, we pledge to you that we will continue to support policies that keep your tax burden low, the bureaucratic red tape to a minimum, and allow you to continue the tradition of success that your family started 60 years ago.

For our final outstanding Missourian...

it was more than 40 years ago that he immigrated to the United States from his native country of Chile. Today he lives and owns a successful business in Wildwood. Please help me make Sergio Cuevas feel welcome.

It has been my privilege to get to know Sergio and to learn his story – a story that personifies the American dream.

Sergio left behind a country oppressed by a communist regime to come to our great nation where he was able to quickly climb the ladder of success. He obtained a quality education, developed his business acumen as a salesman and a supervisor, and ultimately achieved his dream of owning and operating his own business.

He started his Missouri-based business in 2003 with one employee and one contract. Today, Clean-Tek Floor Solutions employs more than a dozen Missourians and has worked successfully with private businesses and governmental agencies on both the state and federal level. From the work his company has done with our department of transportation to waterproof 15 Missouri bridges, to the cleaning services Clean-Tek has provided to Lambert International Airport, Sergio and his employees have developed a reputation for providing quality work and exemplary service.

Sergio's dream was made possible because he left behind a country that was oppressed by an overly intrusive government where his freedoms were suppressed and his rights were ignored. He came here to our nation and our state where we defend these freedoms – where government stays out of the way so enterprising individuals like Sergio have the opportunity to succeed.

Sergio, we appreciate the commitment you have made to making your dream come true right here in Missouri and for being such a vital part of our state's growing economy. Our promise to you is that we will continue to protect the freedoms and rights that inspired you to leave your homeland and make the journey to America four decades ago, and we will keep government out of your way as you continue to grow and expand your business in the decades to come.

All three of these outstanding Missourians may seem to have little in common, but they share with each other, and with us, the dream of a Missouri where jobs are plentiful, our children have access to a quality system of education, and our energy needs are met in a safe and affordable way.

And it is together that we can move our state in the direction of achieving these goals of placing policy into practice and turning sound bites into substantive change.

This session I challenge all of you to put aside any differences we may have – whether partisan, regional or otherwise – and work together to advance an agenda I believe will position Missouri for both immediate and long-term prosperity.

The opportunity lies ahead. While the hours will be long and the challenges numerous, I know we, as a collective of conscientious and compassionate public servants, have the dedication and the determination necessary to make a difference.

Our work begins today.

It begins now.

Let me once again say thank you for providing me this incredible honor of serving you as your Speaker – for allowing me to work with you on matters that will make our great state of Missouri that much greater.

May God bless you all, and may God bless the people of the great state of Missouri.